

India's National Gay and Lesbian Magazine

Vol 06, January 2011

# PiNK

—pages

The Queer Literature  
special issue

Unmasked  
Fairing Diversity  
Stories on a park bench

## Bangalored

A photo feature of the  
November Queer Habba

## God Loves queer

Delhi's date with Vivek Shraya

## The Gay Rapper

Marcos Jose Brito's Mumbai trip

## Bollywood's Gay Moment

Interviews and profiles of the  
'Dunno Y...' lead actors



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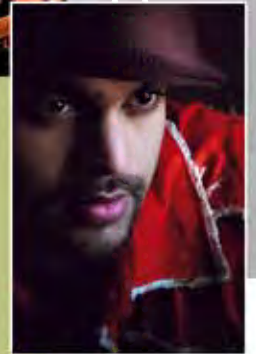
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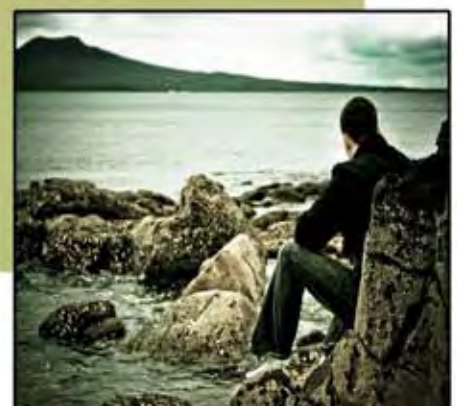
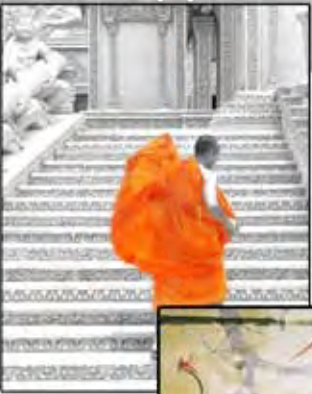
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# Letter from the Editor

The best literature is always the ones where the characters come alive, they speak to us, touch our inner cords, and in turn, we live their lives vicariously. Perhaps, that's where lies the real significance of women's literature, black literature, or queer literature. That's why Edmund White's stories of gay boyhood evoke such empathy in our hearts, and Forster's *Maurice* touches us with his heartbreak and hope.

As gay readers become more confident and open in India, writers will be more emboldened to experiment with new themes. We're already seeing signs of that happening with a motley bunch of gay themed books coming out of Indian writers.



When we, at Pink Pages decided to come out with our first queer literature themed issue, we had many apprehensions in our mind. But the overwhelming response allayed most of the fears we had. Only a very small percentage of the entries we received, have been edited and reproduced here, but we were all struck by the amazing display of talent by our very young readers.

Apart from that, this issue also focuses on IT city Bangalore- a city that we'd called the 'potential gay capital of India' in one of our previous issues. As young professionals from across the country converge in this increasingly cosmopolitan and liberal city, the closely knit LGBT community expresses itself with more confident and colourful tones than ever before. Last month's 'Karnataka Queer Habba' proved just that. Enjoy our photo features from these events here!

Udayan  
Senior Editor



# Editor's Inbox

## A day in gay India

A hearty congratulations to the team. A brilliant issue. Love the photo feature. Going beyond the politics of gay identity, these pictures actually show the human-ness that is present within the queer community- the family, the love, the professions and the ambitions. Each and every moment i feel glad to be a part of this growing thread of happiness and reiterating my identity as Queer and as Indian. Cheers!

- Rohit K Dasgupta

## Men of Faith

Udayan, Jayesh, and dear Amara dasa,

It was so good to read this article: i don't recall ever having read one like this in any gay periodical. it spoke to me on different levels in a way that was, at last, meaningful and real.

Thanks for the effort, Udayan and Jayesh. Please accept my heartfelt appreciation. To be gay/bi is to struggle for understanding, from others, from oneself. And dear Amara prabhu, you understand the Vaishnava creed so well, apply it to challenging situations so consistently, and take recourse to such a remarkable and fecund intuition, I suspect your study of Vaishnava

scripture and Hinduism dovetailed into your understanding of the human condition a loo oo oong time ago!

I think I can safely say that I like the article very much and will be so glad to read more like these. Kudos to you and all such scholars who toil for those challenged by faith and orientation over and over.

Hare Krishna!

- Uttam Singha

Thank you very much for this inspiring and informative article and congratulations to Pink Pages! As an openly gay sannyasi disciple of Srila Bhaktivandanta Narayana Goswami I meet LGBT devotees and people around the world. One thing that I find universally true for all people is the obvious difference between what is ordinary mundane religion and what is actually spiritual. Mundane or worldly religion treats people favourably or dis-favourably according to bodily designations – one's birth. While a truly spiritual perspective sees the individual as an eternal spiritual being with an eternal identity in relationship to the Lord and does not see any material condition which can change that reality.

True there is much education still

needed on all levels; not just with regard to LGBT inclusiveness, and Amara Prabhu and Jayesh Prabhu are admirable teachers who are making a real difference in this regard. Ignorance is the basic cause of all sectarianism and offences to others and thus is the main root cause for delays in spiritual realization.

Thank you again to Pink Pages for this honest and most welcome article revealing the natural inclination for spiritual life amongst all LGBT people.

- Vaisnava dasanudas,  
BV Vaisnava Maharaja

Wonderful article! I can't express what a positive support Amaraji and GALVA have been to me over the years. Like any family we have our moments, but I am so thankful for the GALVA Satsangha. Hopefully the wonderful work that they are doing in the Gaudiya denomination can be extended to other conservative branches of the great wish-fulfilling tree called Sanathana Dharma. The Eternal Truth is for all people, for all time. It is time that we recognize this and free it from narrow class-ism, sectarianism, and ethnic exclusivity. Jai Ram!

- Neil

Pink pages are not so pink, they are often red!

Fabulous. I just love the continuous synchronizing of this article and I just can't do anything but to sit here at my end and ponder upon the negativity of what this world has to offer! I got goosebumps after reading this. I am sad for this misfortune.

- Sambhav Sharma

The Islander Activist

One brave sister, human being and friend!  
Gorgeous too! Thanks for the insights!

- Farooq M

For Love & Everything Else – The story of PlanetRomeo.com

Great work Akhil! It's the 1st Gay Dating Site I've ever joined. One of my Orkut friends suggested to try PR & it did work. The phrase "For Love and everything Else" has aptly been used with PlanetRomeo.com. It's the easiest way to find your needs; be it Friends, be it Flings or be it Relationships. The interview between AK & Jens was amazing.

- Rahul Biswas

When in London, do as you feel like!

I have been to London and its suburbs several times for office work and tried to find a gay roosting place, but failed, maybe because i was shy to ask. Now this superb article has opened doors for me to spend my free nights. Thanks a lot!

- Naval

Gay in Pakistan

Homosexuality is a crime in Pakistan, only when there is a public display of it. But it thrives in the privacy of homes. In a boarding school, where I studied, there were frequent expulsions of boys who were found having sex with each other. There was a boy who had broken all known all records. In the house he was, he started a massive all male orgy for a long spell. Naturally he was expelled, but he returned triumphantly because of his political connections. If you are politically well connected you can flaunt your sex.

- Jeddy

Indjapink trip disappointment

After an eight day tour of Rajasthan with Indjapink I am, ultimately, very disappointed with the trip. Indja's strength is their people; prompt and pleasant email exchanges while arranging the trip, lovely airport greeting, great guides (mostly) and charming dinner companions (mostly). Unfortunately what they promise (and what you pay for) is, in many cases, very different from what you actually receive. I live in South Asia and am familiar with the region's overuse of superlatives when describing things. However I would have thought that a professional travel agent, dealing with foreigners, would adhere to generally accepted terms when describing hotels and other products offered. "Fine dining" turned out to be in a family style restaurant; "Luxury accommodations" were in fact three star characterless hotels/guest houses; a cooking class, described as "a two to three hour journey through the culinary delights of Rajasthan" was in fact a 15 minute stand up in the very basic kitchen of the guide; "dinner with a local noble family" was in a lower middle-class home in a dusty village,

served outside the family toilet"; one of their "gay or gay friendly guides" (the one whose wife conducted the "cooking class") asked embarrassing/insulting questions about my marital status; one of the massages offered was in a broken down center, with a TV blaring and kids screaming, next to an iron workshop etc. Read Loverorient's review on Trip Advisor.com and it appears he has the same issues I have – failure to deliver what was promised. I raised the problems with Indja's staff on my return to Delhi and they seemed surprised. After a month's cordial email correspondence they finally offered me "in good faith" a refund of about US\$175 refund. An insult really considering the tour price was over \$400 per day! Using Injapink was ultimately a waste of money and time. If you are still going to give them a go, I strongly recommend you do the following: Get them to guarantee specific hotels and restaurants then do some on-line checking of your own to make sure they are what Inja says they are. Ensure they give specific details on products such as cooking classes, tours, activities. DO NOT rely on subjective descriptions, ask for specifics. Insist on Kedar Singh as your driver, but make sure you know what type of car you will be driven in – particularly if the tour is an extended driving tour. Seriously consider if the 'pink' touches, such as dinner companions (who were not, thank heavens, 'escorts' but charming men), gay masseurs and gay friendly guides are really worth the additional charges.

- Dal

...Editor's Inbox





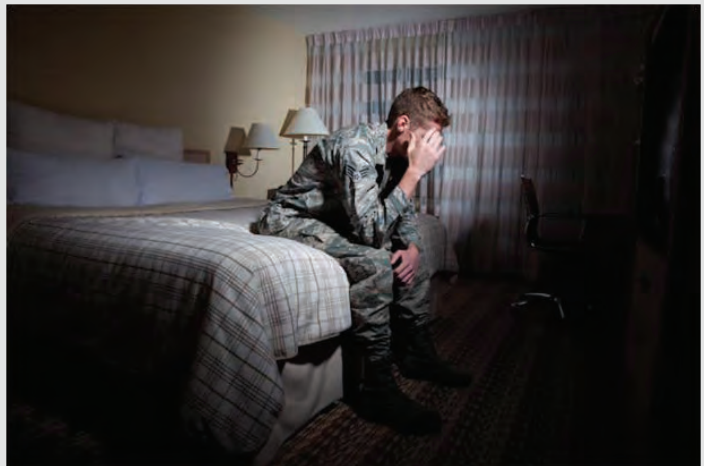
# TOP 10

## LGBT NEWS STORIES OF 2010

By Imtiaz Akhtar

As 2010 comes to an end, Pink Pages looks back at the tumultuous year from a gay perspective. Here are some of the top LGBT news stories that grabbed our attention this year

### I US military starts accepting gay recruits



In October, the US military started accepting gay recruits after a California judge struck down the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy barring openly gay people from serving. Meanwhile the Obama administration is trying hard to push the repeal through the Senate after the House of Representatives cleared it in the last days of the lame duck session.



### NRIs open up to gays at India Day parade

New York’s annual India Day Parade had a new group of marchers. The South Asian Lesbian Gay Alliance, or SALGA, was finally granted permission to be a part of the celebrations.

# 2





## Federal Judge overturns Proposition 8

3



A federal judge in California in August struck down the state's ban on same-sex marriage, ruling that voter-approved Proposition 8 violates the U.S. Constitution — handing supporters of gay rights a major victory in a case that has now been appealed in a higher court by gay marriage opponents

4

## Archie's comics gets first gay character



“The introduction of Kevin is just about keeping the world of Archie Comics current and inclusive. Archie's hometown of Riverdale has always been a safe world for everyone. It just makes sense to have an openly gay character in Archie comic books,” Archie Comics honcho Jon Goldwater said in announcing the news.

## Bollywood's first gay kiss



The movie 'Dunno Y.. Na Jane Kyun' finally hit the screens post-Diwali and made news because it offered Indian audiences something new- a gay kiss.

5



## Ricky Martin comes out



Ricky Martin says his mother "opened the door" for him to come out. In March he wrote on his blog, "I am a fortunate homosexual man".

6



## Hindustan Times

# Gay murders: Police zero in on suspects

## Second victim identified

Aravind Mohan  
New Delhi, August 26

THE POLICE released identities of the two prime suspects in the Pushkin Chandra murder case on Monday. They also identified the second victim in the double murder.

Pushkin's friends said they saw one of the suspects at the party where the US-born MIA was last seen alive. The friends also said the man looked like he could be from the North-east or Nepal. The police said Pushkin, the second victim and the two suspects had gone to Danish national Ulf Gerner's party together a little before midnight but had stayed only for about an hour.

Undigested food in Pushkin's stomach — which he is known to have consumed shortly before leaving for the party — then

### Seen them?



The identities of the two prime suspects in the Pushkin murder case.

did. The report in which Pushkin was stabbed indicated the hands work of a practised hand.

The second victim, a man while, was identified as Kuldeep, a resident of Moharadi. His father is an employee of the AIIMS campus. Kuldeep's brother identified the body. The police said Kuldeep had been unemployed for the

## Pushkin Chandra killers convicted

A Delhi court in February convicted two persons, including an HIV patient in the gruesome murder of two gay men — Pushkin Chandra, son of a retired IAS officer, and his friend Kuldeep in August 2000.

7



8

## Gay Saudi Prince murder scandal



Saud Bin Abdulaziz Bin Nasir al Saud, 34, who is a grandson of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, is accused of killing Bandar Abdullah Abdulaziz in a top London hotel on February 15 after abusing him for weeks. The prince is alleged to have murdered the servant in a ferocious attack with a "sexual element".





9

## Nepal's first gay pride



Nepal witnessed its first queer pride march this year. Homosexuality is taboo in Nepal but the country of 29 million people is being seen as increasingly gay friendly over the last few years.

## Gay Professor Siras allegedly murdered in his flat in Aligarh



Professor Srinivas Ramchander Siras, 63, chair of the department of modern Indian languages at Aligarh Muslim University, was suspended and ordered to leave his official residence after being secretly filmed having sex with a rickshaw puller. He was found dead days after a court revoked his suspension and he was set to return to work. Police initially said it was a case of suicide but changed their version after poison was found in his body and his mobile phone went missing. A case of murder has been registered and six people have been arrested.

On 28th of November, Bangalore saw its third edition of the Pride March coinciding with Delhi's march. It was preceded by two weeks of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) events called the Karnataka Queer Habba (between Nov 18-Nov 28).

# BANGLORE UNMASKED

By Sharath Iyengar  
Photography by Dinudey Baidya



The parade was organized by the CSMR (Campaign for Sexuality Minorities Rights), which is a coalition of many LGBTQ and allied groups and individuals, mainly based in Bengaluru, intended to promote acceptance, tolerance, and equality for the city's LGBT community.





Post Section 377, Pride this year was less of a protest and more of a celebration, a fact underlined by the organizers themselves.

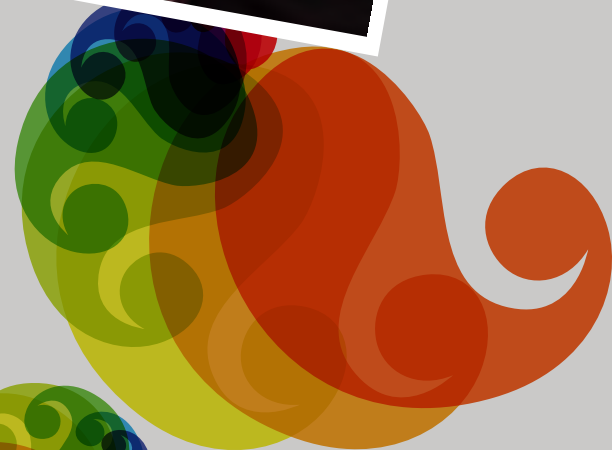
Marchers assembled at Tulsi Park (next to Majestic bus stand) and marched towards Banappa park through Anand Rao Circle, Freedom Park and Corporation Circle.







Under huge rainbow flags and umbrellas, to the sound of drums, whistles and horns, nearly one thousand LGBT activists and supporters danced, sang, cheered and waved placards as they marched through the city of this still sexually conservative country.



Marchers assembled at Tulsi Park (next to Majestic bus stand) and marched towards Banappa park through Anand Rao Circle, Freedom Park and Corporation Circle.



They held banners and shouted slogans marking the event as a celebration of diversity.



The parade was led by Arvind Narain, a prominent member of the city's LGBT community- an astute lawyer who was instrumental in the Section 377 case at the Delhi High Court.





A large posse of police personnel were never far from the marchers, keeping an eye on the goings-on. But most participants seemed oblivious to their presence.



Despite the Delhi High Court ruling, gays still face a social stigma in India, where hugging and kissing in public even among heterosexual couples is strongly frowned upon. So this was one day when many gay couples could flaunt their love on the streets of India.





"Strong religious and family values mean many homosexuals choose to hide their sexuality for fear of discrimination, while attacks by police, especially in rural areas, are common." said Kamal, a supporting marcher.



The activists of sexual minority groups hope the event will improve awareness about them and help generate wider acceptance.



# Fairing Diversity

By Kevin Fernandes  
Photography by Dinudey Baidya

For most of Bangalore's gay community, being gay revolves around Planet Romeo (the online dating site), Chin Lung (the queer friendly pub on Brigade road), Barista's on MG road, the weekly parties by miscellaneous organizers including Party Square and Pink Nation, and the once-in-a-year Pride Parade. To bring the gay community in touch with the other letters of the acronym LGBT, the organizers of this year's Pride, chalked out a series of cultural and awareness programmes, with tonnes of fun and socializing thrown in. One such event was the Pride Mela held on Nov 21st at the Samsa Open Air Auditorium.



The Mela opened up at 11am in the morning and was centered on the open stage and its amphitheater of the Samsa Open Air Auditorium. With many stalls set up, and giving the vibrancy and colour the community is known for, the whole venue had the air of a fair in all its glory. While the audience, seated on the steps on the amphitheater clapped and cheered to numbers danced to and sung by members of the community (many of which were impromptu performances), many others, including a significant number of supporters and curious on lookers browsed around the stalls set up, some of which sold pride merchandise, books, food and the traditional information stalls.





Azaadbazaar (India's 1st LGBT pride store, which is based in Mumbai) sent in their team with the vibrant Rainbow colours on every conceivable item from key links and wrist bands to fake eye lashes and windmills. T-shirts with catchy slogans like 'Well Behaved Women rarely make history' and 'Pink Sheep' dotted their corner. Queer-Ink's stall was filled with a wonderful repertoire of self-help, fiction, erotica and a host of other books written by and for the LGBT community. Speaking to Pink Pages, Shobhna Kumar, the proprietress of Queer-Ink, said that

despite Mumbai having a large LGBT community, she had never experienced or seen an event like this. She went on to express her regret on being unable to stay for the rest of the events.

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Pink Nation was there, with a corner selling t-shirts, scented candles and an assortment of all things wild and wonderful, and a chaat stall. Party Square set up a juice and fruit bowl kiosk. A mehendi artist lent his talent to adorn the palms of quite a few Eves, not to mention sporting Adams as well. There were two information stalls- one, an awareness centre on AIDS, and the other bearing information relating to the Pride







events and the NGOs actively involved with LGBT issues. There was a little pottery corner, and what seemed to be a fortune teller of sorts (I assumed so reading her board 'The Love, Sex, Anything stall')

With the whole arena covered by members of the community, I jumped to the opportunity to speak to the first straight person I met at the venue who happened to be Goutam, the Principal of Drishti School of Photography, which was officially visually documenting the Pride events. He told Pink Pages that he didn't find members of the LGBT community abnormal as the vast majority does. He went on to add that there was a dire need for social integration as even homosexuality was an expression of love and society shouldn't interfere in the same.

What definitely added to the festive spirit was the wall plastered with papers, where anyone could walk up and express him/her self on the same, and the cute little 'rose lady' (that's what my friend and myself called her, till we learnt her real name), who, for a paltry sum, would carry a rose and a message from any shy soul to his/her crush. Believe us, it was exhilarating receiving a rose from her, from my 'secret admirer' who turned out to be a good friend of mine. A few games were also conducted at the venue and the organizers were honoured with roses (which somehow didn't surprise us).

Anyone walking towards the venue would see the Rainbow flag waving in all its glory and sheen. It is the true representation of the LGBT community- vibrant, colourful, and like the flag on that day, waving, active and live. I was reminded of the lyrics of waving flag-

*When I get older, I will be stronger  
They'll call me freedom, just like a Waving Flag*





# Love and Longing in Bangalore,

BY UDAYAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DINUDEY BAIDYA

Tales of love and despair, heartbreak and ecstasy. Such was the theme at the city's iconic Cubbon Park on a warm November afternoon as Bangalore's queers sat down on the park's benches and shared their tales at this unique event called 'Park Bench Stories'.



People assembled under a rainbow banner and basked under the wintry sun at a place once famous as the city's most happening gay cruising spot





For this motley acting group, stories are best conveyed as intimate conversations between the closest of friends.



Each story shared was one of immense love and passion, at the same time, of longing and desires.







Some sang, some recited poetry. Others shared an experience or two.



For the rest it was a treat to the queer ears like never before.





Moods of the audience changed with the underlying tone of the storytellers. From passion to melancholy, and empathy to detachment.



Some of the stories surprised us, some enchanted us, others left behind a question or two.





For couples like this one, it was the time to share their love stories with the closely knit community in Bangalore.



The Park Bench stories were followed by a candle light vigil for those transgenders who'd taken their lives as a terminating escape from oppression and indifference.





# GOD *LOVES QUEER?*



Vikram Tyagi's small talk with Indian-born Toronto based alternative rocker *Vivek Shraya* about his recently launched book, "God loves Hair", a collection of short stories, his immortal love for music and his visit to India.

## **How's it going here in India?**

So far it's going really really well. It's been such an amazing trip. I haven't been here for twelve years.

## **What difference do you find after twelve years?**

When I came here last time, I was seventeen, just coming out. I spent most of the time in an ashram. So this time I'm having an urban experience which is totally different. My sensory levels are always at ten here in India, even if it's to do with traffic.

## **Tell us something about your book. What triggered you to write it?**

The stories are about gender, religion, being queer and being brought up in Canada. One of the big reasons is when I started reading queer literature, I

noticed there were not lot of stories that reflected my own experiences as South Asian. If I was a teenager again, it would speak to me, like what it meant to have immigrant parents in Canada, what it meant growing up in a Hindu household.

## **Which is your favourite story from the book?**

I have to say it's 'Dear Vishnu'. It's about how I grew up surrounded by Hindu masculinity and how that's very different than North American masculinity.

## **Any particular character that you relate most with?**

All stories are autobiographical and based on my life's experiences. I am kind of main character in all stories. So it's hard to say which is my favourite character.

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**Your book is a part of the course curriculum at University of Alberta, Brock University and George Brown College. How do you think it helps queer students?**

There is a lot of gay literature but not all of them are about people of colour. As a Human Rights Advisor, I do anti-homophobia workshops but at some point, they stop affecting people. After a while people get de-sensitised. If people hear people's life's stories, it has a larger impact. So when they read it, they can relate to it. It helps people realise our experiences and our stories.

## **Do you try and establish any kind of synchronisation between your writings and your music?**

I try to. When I read, I sing some bhajans. I am really inspired to make art that brings change. Right now my music is very much pop. It's all about love, heartbreak, dancing. But I'm hoping in the future to make music that's a little more challenging.



**Vivek performing at Delhi's  
Hard Rock Cafe**

# Extra-Connubial Gay Affair

## *...in reel and real life*



Dunno Y...Na Jaane Kyun is a film based on complexities of relationships and multiple affairs. Gladrags model-turned actor (and dancer) Yuvraaj Parashar plays Rituparna Sen's husband, Zeenat Aman's son, Helen Jairag Richardson's grandson and Kapil Sharma's boyfriend. Did Yuvraj possibly fit in the complexities of an extra-connubial gay affair, in a still homophobic nation? Sourendra Kumar Das meets him

I have seen Dunno Y...Na Jaane Kyon twice, first the unedited version in April 2010 at Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival and later in November 2010 the edited form at a special screening where I was invited by Yuvraaj Parashar and Kapil Sharma at PVR Cinemas, Juhu in Mumbai. I was

sandwiched between designer Riyaz Gangji and his wife Reshmi, so in the interval I went out to chew the fat with Yuvraj.

Yuvraj, along with his PRO for the film Himanshu Jhunjunwala was welcoming the guests, when I shot the breeze about the projection of multiple affairs depicted in the movie. I

sat down with Yuvraj in the third-floor of PVR, sipping a coke and munching pop-corns to tell you what he feels about multiple affairs in reel and real life.

Homosexuality and infidelity both are commonplace and fairly visible in our modern society. Bengali actress Rituparna Sengupta's role as Rebecca (Yuvraj's wife in the film) where she indulges in an extra-marital affair with her (gay) husband's own brother is also a familiar story. We cannot even pass over Zeenat Aman romancing two men at one time in the film.

Yuvraj feels as the choices have increased today, staying with one person in life is quite unimaginable! Even Ranbir Kapoor came out openly about his multiple affairs in an episode of Coffee with Karan where he openly discloses his strategies to handle many girlfriends and Deepika Padukone telling in the other episode of the same TV show that a packet of condoms is ideally the best gift for her present neighbor and ex-boyfriend.

Y still feels that quite often friendship between two stars is mistaken as an affair, impugning us (journalists) that we have a habit of connecting people whenever they come together and perhaps enjoy a lighter moment together at a party or elsewhere. He says the population of the Tinseltown, the likes of actors, models, designers, make-up artists, and even fashion and film journalists often fall prey to multiple affairs. But Y acquits himself from that crowd as he is monogamous and is waiting for his true love in life.



According to Priyanka Chopra in Dostana 'Pyar to andha hota hai,' and yes Y contradicts with what Kiran Rao said in the film, telling that Love is blind and does not judge the sex of an individual. Married in a heterosexual marriage and yet having an extra-marital affair with his gay partner is politically felony but not beyond the pale. There are blatant mental and bodily desires of both the sexes, so if a married (gay) man has the right to have a boyfriend, the wife should not be abstained from the same because she is a woman. Even in small towns like Agra and Meerut, Y knows about wives who have realized that their man is gay and yet have a continued happy secret affair with the husband's brother or friend.

Despite the audience liking the film; distributors had a tough time releasing the film as they said the bare-bodied scenes are unfavorably chosen for Indian family audience. The irony is that Mallika Sherawat baring her butts in Hiss releases without much hullabaloo in Indian cinemas in the same date.

**I remember at the premier of My Brother...Nikhil, while interviewing Onir some five years ago in Fun Republic in Mumbai he had said, 'My film is based on true historical fact, and the standard disclaimer about the fictitious content was just a compromise with the country's Government to gain permission to take the film to the silver screen.'**

When I met Mallika in the premier of Hiss, while interviewing her, she laughed and said, 'It is my body, no one tells me how much to show!' I wish Yuvraj, Kapil, Rituparna or Maradona could say the same to the Indian audience for their love-making scenes in the film. Nevertheless, we should not forget Dunno Y like a mirror projected a section of the society and that section is scared to see their image in the theatres too!

Y is flooded with appreciation emails, sms, phone-calls from nationwide cinema lovers and complains from his fans in Meerut who want to watch the movie, but the film is not released in his hometown. I remember at the premier of My Brother...Nikhil, while interviewing Onir some five years ago in Fun Republic in Mumbai he had said, 'My film is based on true historical fact, and the standard disclaimer about the fictitious content was just a compromise with the country's Government to gain permission to take the film to the silver screen.'

Indian masses have moved on and the cinema audience accepts movies like Dostana and Dunno Y. But Y tells the gay readers of Pink Pages that multiple affairs has only cons and no pros, being faithful to one man is the key to happiness in life. To others he says, 'I am proud of the viewers that despite homophobia in the society, you have come to the theatres to watch a gay film.'





# The Gay Rapper



Marcos Jose Brito is UK's most famous gay rapper and the pioneer of the new sub-genre 'Homo Hop.' He's young, he's gifted, he's Gay. Did Marcos possibly fit into the notoriously bigoted, often homophobic world of hip-hop? Sourendra Kumar Das meets him

Sometimes, I have encountered people, even strangers who begin to interest me at first sight before a word has been spoken. I sit down at Café Samovar at Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai to tell you my lasting yet brief encounter with such a person whom the world knows as QBoy, the original rapper in hip-hop circa and as one of the pioneers of the new sub-genre colloquially known as 'Homo Hop.'

Music indeed is a necessity of life and only a handful would be the ones, in whose life music has not made an impact. Marcos aka QBoy is not an exception as from the age of six, he found himself getting fascinated by the music, dancers and their matching

costumes. As years passed by, he got inspired by the likes of Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, Notorious B.I.G. and Trina, with his notion 'if they can be sexually explicit, so can I.'

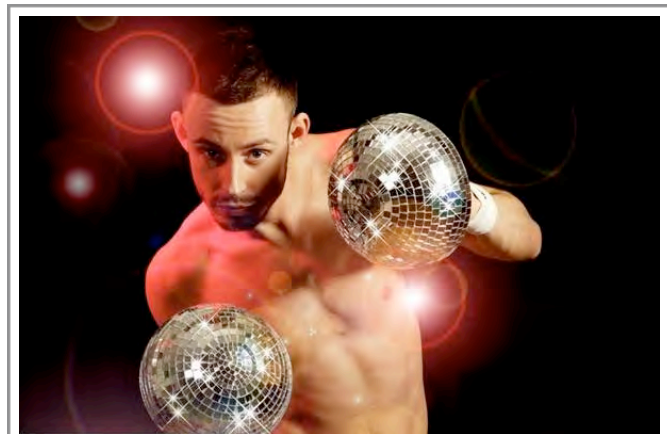
M always knew that he liked men, only when he grew up he got to know the term 'gay.' But being gay in school was never easy for him, overcoming the bullying of school-mates was quite a painful task. They would often call him names and it was mentally draining for him to go to school everyday. But when he went to college, he

turned the tables and used his sexuality as a weapon against homophobia.

His works started with being sexually free and liberated as he would listen to Gangsta rap and find its explicitness quite witty. His initial works were sexually very explicit and his alternative sexuality made him write it more unambiguously. Later on, as years passed by, his works even delved into topics like spirituality, universe, humanity, and the likes. Love and Relationship is something that he feels is too personal and hence finds it difficult to express easily.

M was nominated for Performing Artist of The Year at the premier GALA Awards, while his acclaimed TV documentary 'Coming Out to Class' for Channel 4 was much appreciated where he looks back to his homophobic encounters at his school. He is presently working on a dance project with NYC producer/DJ Larry Tee under the name of 'Sam LeMans' that is releasing this year.

M tells young readers of Pink Pages that the road may be difficult initially, but a little help from someone can make it worth walking the way. For other he says, 'CHECK ME OUT, I am in your country for the first quarter of this year!'



# 10 QUEER FASHION *faux pas!*

RJ Ranveer

RJ knows you had a blast this Christmas and hopes all those socks were found stuffed the next morning (exceptions for those who asked for Martins and Pitts...). And also reminiscent of the fact that party frenzy people are finding it difficult to wait for the final countdown to start so that they can bid a good bye to the first decade of the century...

Well it's also a time to take a stock of things that worked and those which didn't, who rocked and who flopped, who made eyes rolling and who made them shut, who's in muck and who got @\$#%...

Here RJ's listing the top 10 fashion trends which made us feel pukish, suffocated and some even got mild heart attacks after being subjected to them. RJ's praying on four limbs that coming 2011 would save us from the tyranny of being inundated with these trends. Here's the list and RJ seriously hopes that you don't match a single of them...



**Ultra-tight jeans:** Well apart from being the biggest fashion faux pass they are also a health hazard, just think of it: blood not flowing to the right body parts when required... Consequences are DIRE...!

**Overdone tattoos:** Remember it's your body not a canvas and "less is always more".



**Boxers:** Nope...they themselves are not a disaster, on the contrary, quite comfortable but please try not to be seen with "ONLY" these in public places, not even in nearby markets hide them in pyjamas or shorts.

**Rainbow Shaped eyebrows:**

Whether bushy looks good or not but men's eyebrows which resembles perfectly arched rainbows are certainly NOT in...!

**Too much glittery Indian wear:**

Keep away from them until and unless it's your own wedding. Plain silk kurtas in bold colors look much better and pocket friendly.

**Sandals with socks:** RJ strongly advises you buy a pair of shoes.



**Men's Makeup:** Taking care of skin is perfectly fine but please do not get caught with mascara loaded eyes or cheeks done with a blusher. Outright sin in the eyes of the fashion police and only punishment is a life term.

**Weird Hairdos:** If you think you look dapper in this DO NOT READ FURTHER. Indian guys with hairstyles resembling Japanese Ikebana are a recipe for disaster. And BOY you are doing one every time you are sporting it.



**Fake Accessories:** If you think you can pass that fake one lifted from a flea market as a Christian Dior...you are badly mistaken. People do have a fair idea how exactly branded things look like. So BEWARE...!!!

RJ is leaving this one for you guys...do share with us what you think apart from these could have made to the list...!

***P.S: RJ wishes you, your partner (get one this year if you don't have one) and your family a Happy New Year!***



# FASHION GYAN FOR *A la mode Date*

**Inder Vhatwar** is a young, handsome and vivacious entrepreneur and a former student from **London School of Fashion**. Inder recently kick-started *India's First Gay Multi-Designer Store, D'KLOSET* that was inaugurated post Christmas by his close friend ex-Miss India **Celina Jaitley**, who is also considered as the brand ambassador for the LGBT Movement in India. During the New Year, a lot many singles would love to date and start afresh. Inder gives some fashion tips but tells the readers of **PINK PAGES** that “dating should be more of meeting inner necessity and less about matching outward circumstances.”



*The smart and handsome Inder gives some Fashion tips for Gay Dating this New Year 2011*

- *You should always dress for the occasion and setting where your date is going to take place.*
- *Always pick colors that enhance your personality.*
- *Be bold with your color combination.*
- *The fashion should make a statement about who you are and be contemporary.*
- *Be confident in the style and color of the clothes you wear.*



*Use Inder's tips and enhance your chance of hooking up with the right date for 31<sup>st</sup> December and a new boyfriend for the Year 2011. Dudes, Play safe!*

*(As told to Sourendra Kumar Das)*



## THE QUEER LITERATURE ISSUE

*Pink Pages delved into the belletristic finesse of queer Indians, spawned from which the following pages of the best of short fiction and poetry collection for our readers— both gay and straight... truly a collectors' piece!*

*Happy reading...*



# A Soap Bubble and a Couple of Revolutions

by Kishore Kumar

Nightly train journeys  
lead me to the inevitable:  
The chilly winds stir up memories of a  
winter  
we refused to pull down the shutters,  
And the incessant sway of the coach  
makes me thank  
the long, long train journey that brought  
you to me.

I promised myself to get over this  
nostalgia;  
But that was a promise that couldn't  
stand against  
an unyielding love, or the night train  
home.

My mind wandered on into abandoned  
territory,  
and I let it:  
Perhaps a little pain can cure the  
numbness  
of my heart.

I bypass the lunches under the margosa  
and the cycling on flat tyres,  
And walk to the day of the missing  
mistletoe  
and the quick hug on the doorstep:  
That was the day you opened the  
windows  
and showed me the stars.

Then there was the story of a seer who  
predicted  
an inseparable friendship;  
There were days when we discussed  
part-time gods and misshapen universes.  
There were nights with Gibran  
and storms in inkpots,  
And there was the magic of an addictive  
smile  
that did what a thousand battles  
couldn't.

When you met me on those corridors  
that summer, you and your fragrance  
defined home to me like nothing else.  
You gave me colour and meaning,  
and the memory of a sleepless, frigid  
summer.  
You gave me Gandalf in return for my  
Dumbledore,  
and a love story that kills and resurrects.  
We built an eternal soap bubble and  
sucked time out of it,  
and filled it with our souls and  
quizbooks.

And then the day when under a fan with  
four blades  
you fed me a spoonful of life,  
Followed by the night I spent under the  
moon  
looking at your face and guessing your  
dreams;

And there's the bittersweet pain in the  
memory of the day  
I feared I didn't deserve you:  
You took me so close in your arms and  
whispered,  
"Would you talk about you deserving  
yourself?"

You gave me a challenge, a box of  
chocolates and questions to answer.  
You gave me dreams to chase, which will  
overflow a lifetime.

That was a long ago summer in a far  
away country,  
and a far away happiness –  
Because for reasons that I do not know  
exist,  
I lost the soap bubble and my soul along  
with it:  
My deciduous delights were exactly that.

-

By another train journey I reach our  
semi-arid tropics;  
it is summer again.  
I've made this journey many times  
before  
but it never was this painful;  
Down pour memories of a violet ink and  
yellow envelopes  
I no longer use,



And of the very next summer I came to  
say goodbye  
and you gave me a mock embrace.  
I've been many things and places since,  
but one thing I haven't felt  
in five years, is home.

That mocking, jeering, disheartening  
hug of yours,  
made the first crack in my heart.  
Then one day you crossed the road  
forgetting me, and leaving me behind  
you.

Then came the day you told me your  
dreams were your own  
and your plans are but your business.  
You told me you wouldn't correct me  
any longer, nor should I,  
for there are limits!  
Because however close two universes  
come, you said,  
there is always a fine line separating  
them.  
That was when we stopped debating and  
started arguing –  
we were on that one way road.

What followed wasn't a blur, it was one  
long moment  
of unacknowledged oblivion  
My silence and your insouciance,  
broken promises and fatal changes –  
Were you tired of me, or was it  
somebody else?  
Was it the different places that we had to  
go?  
Or was I just a compromise and a stand-  
in until  
somebody else walked in?

There was a day I said I was going to  
miss you,  
that I will wait, come back for you.  
(Such a cliché. You answered with a line  
that could be  
a writer's delight).  
You said you wouldn't miss me, that you  
will stay  
with yourself, wherever you go.  
That was the last time I expected  
someone to wait for me;  
the last time I ever counted myself in.

I befriended the moon and conducted a  
lunar love affair,  
and added my tale to his long repertoire.  
There were long nights on the stairs  
when  
tears wiped all thought away.  
I shredded your letters and burnt my  
diaries, but still you haunt my dreams –

this is the one promise you've kept.

Disappointment. Humiliation. These  
were your choicest words for me when I  
needed you.

Was acceptance impossible? Had  
understanding gone out of fashion?  
That was the final blow, the final crack  
in my crumbling heart.

That was when I forgot what emotion  
meant.

The chirping of birds and glorious  
sunsets no longer meant anything:

I went to bed with the Reaper's  
daughter called despair.

The passage of time didn't make sense  
anymore.

Years passed and my wounds didn't heal,  
didn't bleed.

Worldly fortune was fair to me and  
humoured  
the glutton I became trying to fill an  
invisible void;

But all the cities I've been to had  
nothing to offer

to fill this obstinately dead void.

I tried to run away from it, tried to  
wash myself of everything life refused to  
give me;

I absconded the man in white and the  
smiling woman who taught us life;  
in a happy, happening rich world, I  
became numb.

I only did not realize that in this great  
escapade,

I was running away from myself.

But today, here I stand in this grand little  
town  
we once called home.

The green patch where once we sat  
entwined, and the bench where I waited  
for you,  
are still there and enquire about you;  
Someone mentions Physics and my heart  
skips a beat, and I visit  
shady Attar shops in search of a lost  
Arabian perfume;

The noisy summer wind however, is not  
accompanied  
by your voice, nor do I feel your breath  
on my face.

And I realize, the melody in your arms  
might never again claim me.

Our library asks me questions I dared  
not acknowledge,  
and our corridors rebuke my numbness;  
People ask me where you are and I say  
somewhere up north, having fun;

And my eyes lose their dryness  
and regain a depth I deemed impossible.

In our dusty little town that gave us raw  
mangoes  
and exalted purposes,  
I realised it was time I looked for the  
pieces  
and started picking them up.

Plaques and pictures brought me home  
from the emptiness I madly sought:  
I can't live in an uninviting yesterday  
in a lost world;  
Because I am human and my search for  
permanence  
is capable of looking beyond one  
eternity that decided to be ephemeral.  
Nor can I annihilate those memories  
which lie at the heart of all I am;  
Nor can I desert our dreams which still  
fuel my days  
and court the stars.

-

### Epilogue

I don't want to be a dead phoenix.  
I want to rise again, just like I did every  
time I fell  
before you happened.

There is a world you gave me.  
There is a world you stole from me.  
And there is an insane moment when the  
two come frighteningly close,  
and a moment of horror when they  
converge.  
I live in that impossible moment.  
Anything else would be just a mediocre  
imitation of life.

A decision is imminent:  
The lights are dimmed, and I need to  
take  
a blind turn.  
Yes, I am ready.

For if the Giver of Things asks me now,  
what's the one thing I want to clutch to  
my bosom forever,  
I am no longer sure what the answer  
would be.  
And I want to find out.

# The other man

By Udayan

It was unlikely the downpour would stop tonight. Sheets upon sheets of dark and silver liquid strewing across the rickety windows of the junior editor's office. There were reports of violence coming in till late into the night. I was just an intern but work was a deluge, so Sameer asked me to stay back. The killings in Bombay were expected, but the wintry rains in Calcutta tonight were not. I had to board a local from Dumdum to Shyambazar, and from there take a rickshaw to my Scottish Church's Duff Hostel on Beadon Street which was a further two kilometres away. In this rain, there was no chance of either reaching the station without getting drenched or getting a rickshaw from there, if I didn't make it in another half hour.

The room was dark now. I looked at my watch. A platinum Breitling, that my cousin brought from Zurich last year. My more successful cousin. Journalism interns apparently don't belong to that category, if my mother is to be believed. "Why do you want to be a journalist when you can be an engineer?"

It was quarter to eleven. Buses would've stopped plying through the city. Like blood that suddenly stood still inside veins. And Calcutta drifting into a coma. From the first floor window I could see a couple of blue and yellow painted wooden buses parked under a streetlight. Abandoned toys on the bare floor of an asylum city whose children were fast asleep.

The door opened finally and Sameer, my editor walked in once again. His face looked beautiful in the dark room, illuminated slightly by the streetlights outside and the lighted cigarette he held within his fingers. His long, dark face. His stubbled skin upon his sylphlike



cheekbones. It had just been a week since I joined and I was falling in love with that face.

"Gave them the reports. Bombay's not the only place where riots have broken out" He said as he entered the room. His voice non-chalant, professional. "Had to get the generators on at the printers"

He heaved himself onto the wooden chair. Removed his glasses, and inhaled the smoke deeply. Then looked up at the ceiling. The dust smeared ceiling fan gave him a sinister stare back. His stubble touched the tip of his Adam's apple. I observed its rhythmic movements in sync with the effusing smoke.

“Let’s hit the sack, mister.” He said as he threw the butt of his cigarette away. In the dark room, I saw the little missile projectile its way above the desk, and fall on the concrete floor, disbanding its little sparks around.

I followed him into the guest room on the third floor. I watched his tall, lean silhouette frame against the milieu of the torch’s light. The guest room had an emergency solar lamp. I pressed the protruding black switch and it sated the room with white neon light. By the time my eyes adjusted he had taken his shirt off, and was wearing a white vest tucked into his trousers. I could see he’d been sweating. His vest hugged him with the wetness it had absorbed. The black hair on his chest that showed was cleaving to his skin. I sat down on the bed just to get closer to him. As I inhaled the muskiness in the air, I felt the hair on my skin stand up, as if in awe of the sweet-sour smell of his sweat.

“Like what you’re seeing, eh?” I was caught by the unexpectedness and the jest of it. “Yeah baby, give me more..”, I laughed out sarcastically, my faltering voice trying hard not to fragment, amazed at my own audacity. “Then, you’ll get more..” he gave me a longer stare, and put his hands on my shoulders. The warmth of those hands rushed through my veins. My male hardness showed beneath my blue jeans. A snag. A chill. I dared not to look at his. I slowly and awkwardly fell on my back upon the mattress. I craved to yield myself to him, as he took off his vest and revealed his fetching self. My hands reached out and pulled back the lamp’s tiny black switch. For a few moments, I lost him in the darkness, and then I lost myself in him.

The next three months were a blur. I loved the way he trotted his tongue down my neck, to my belly button, his moist warm breath, tickling the fine line of hair that ran down further. I loved the way his strong hands held me firmly by my waist as he entered me. I loved his fuzzy touch on my face as I woke up in the mornings, since the nights were rarely spent at my hostel those days.

The world was perfect. There was only one deception, one blemish in the wholeness— Sameer had a wife.

\*\*\*

It’s not that I was kept in the dark. “I’m married, you know”, it was divulged, matter-of-factly on day three. The black coffee I was sipping on the verandah of his Saltlake flat suddenly smacked too bitter to be drunk. The cool December breeze precipitously froze the pumping in my arteries. I spent the day on College Street, dusting gray, scraggy books with my fingers till they were smeared black. I bought an Albert Camus and a Samuel Becket. On the first page of Becket’s *Endgame* were these smudged, charcoaled words,

“Laura, sometimes I think, we’re also like Hamm and Clove. So imperfect in ourselves. So we came together to complete each other. Yet, here we often are... waiting for the *Endgame*..

Love, Jonathan, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1961”

But I did entrain the metro from Central to Shyambazar, took a bus to Salt Lake, and then a rickshaw to his apartment, drifting past the chic homes of Calcutta’s rich, walked up the two flights of stairs, and rang the bell. He opened the door, nailed me by the shoulder, lugged me in. We kissed. The nicotine and the scotch cuffed my senses, and warted my cognitions. Perhaps I had yearned for that to happen.

Our venereal encounters became difficult after his wife returned home from her journalistic assignments in northern Sri Lanka. Shiuli and I must’ve become friends at some point of time. I listened to her mellow recitals of Nazrul Islam and Jibanananda on spring afternoons while Sameer was busy at work. I helped her choose the best Burgundy wine for the *Coq au Vin* she was making at home, after she was gifted a book on French cooking by a colleague. I was the one who accompanied her to the salon at Park Street where she finally got the curls she wanted. I felt uncontrollably delighted and sad for her as she looked into the mirror,

her hair a riotous bun, the Kohl in her eyes subtly submerging into her aphotic skin.

Yes, Shiuli and I must’ve become friends at some point of time. For that’s the reason she thought it was okay to do what she did.

It was a sultry May afternoon. The febrile sun vaporised the Hoogly as much as it sogged the humanity on the restless streets. I came to their house to pick up my college bag that I’d left at their place the previous evening when I attended their first wedding anniversary party. Sameer wasn’t at home. When Shiuli opened the door, her eyes were red from crying. Her face shrunken from the wrench of what was devouring her from within.

“Please promise you’ll never see Sameer again.” Her eyes beseeched, begged.

She had read through the pages of my journal that was lying in my bag. I picked it up and left. And never saw him again for the next two months during which I ceded myself to the therapeutic causatums of Marjorie Bowen and marijuana. Till the day he knocked on my hostel door, in an inebriated state. It was early dawn. He hadn’t shaved in days, and his face had sunk.

He sat on the bed for several moments before breaking down. “She killed herself. She killed herself..” the words rolled within the stunted hostel room into my ears, oozed through my veins, choking every cell of my body.

\*\*\*

“She said she always knew something was wrong. Very wrong” Sameer was almost talking to himself as he stared into the vastness of the Hooghly. It was late evening and dark clouds were hovering over the spears of the temple tops of the Belur Monastery upon whose stretched-out and open lawns we were sitting. Worshippers were gathering in bunches—children tugging on to the sarees of their mothers. Old couples getting off the motorized ferries that were transporting people from the other bank. Saffron robed



monks with shaved heads breezing inside the temple, bare foot.

Almost two months had passed by since Shiuli had decided it was better to die than have a husband who was in love with another man. "It is not me who he loves.." that's all she'd written in her suicide note, found in her embroidered jute wallet Sameer had bought for her from Puri. But that was enough for her father- a senior Writer's Building councillor to lodge a slew of criminal cases against his son-in-law.

Those were the months when we came closer on a more emotional plane. Sitting on the wooden benches of the district court in Calcutta, taking long walks on the Maidan, in the shadows of Fort William, staring at the night fishermen for hours on the banks of the Hooghly at Belur. That's when I saw the fracturable, more vulnerable side of the invincible god I deified. That was the time when he told me about his childhood days at Kalimpong, how he cycled his winding

hilly way to school on frosty December mornings, how tranquilizing the aroma of hot green tea felt on those wintry nights, how the Gorkha boy from Darjeeling stole his heart and how they kissed on top of Tiger Hill after dusk. He told me of his college days at Delhi, where he was equally enamoured and disillusioned with the radical Left, and he told me of how he could not refuse when Shiuli, his childhood pal, asked him for a life together.

And that was also the time when he became increasingly religious. I realized it was the guilt that was eating him from within. So I never dissuaded him. He'd spend hours at the monastery, reading the scriptures, books on lectures by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and chanting and meditating at home.

After nearly a year, all charges were eventually dropped. They could never find the existence of the elusive "other woman". I presume it never occurred to them that there was no "other woman". My studies were over and I had a job offer from the

Madras office of The Hindu. Yes, my mother was finally proud of her journalist son. But I was hollow inside. I felt the last one year had sapped my innards of the blood life that flowed through my arteries. My heart pumped void space. Undesired memories clogged my veins.

But perhaps I could never totally realize how or what he felt. He was no longer living in this world. And so maybe it wasn't that bad that he enunciated it despite my passionate palliations. Sameer was formally ordained into the Ramakrishna mission as a monk on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1994. That morning, before the initiation ceremony I came to meet him at the temple, for the one last time. It was raining exactly like it rained on that fateful winter night two years back. Endless sheets of water, silt and twigs lashed the granite temple walls. I waited for him to speak. He said he loved me. I asked him to say that once again. And so he said it again. And again. And again.

# How does he say the word...

By Abhishek Chaudhary

When he uses swear words  
Wheedling on the tip of his tongue  
Like automatic bloopers  
"Bitch" becomes a hyperbolic sigh  
Of his most innate threads.

He enunciates the F word  
He jams it with a couple of more  
Obnoxiously sweet words  
But the moment he vehicles them  
On his tepid lip curves  
Letting every word to comfortably  
Numb all of his other words  
You will be entrenched in his saliva's  
warmth.  
You will cuddle.

He will fuck.  
Everything in his language,  
All over his body  
Seems to spiral like a python

Which advertises his  
Romantic crimes  
He would commit when  
You are naked in his infinite  
Universe, dripping and viscous  
Wild, schizophrenic.

I know  
It centers a lover's existence.  
Drink from him,  
The poison of scented nights  
When he strands flowers on your  
Chest, like a child matting  
An old drawing with an excess  
Of colors.  
Smell him,  
When he begins  
To undo your horrors  
With his slick tongue  
Nebulously gauging  
The fathoms of your survival.

And he would curse you again  
Even while his thick hair  
Foliages your pubis  
Like lush weed  
Even when  
His eyes are pursed  
Like they never opened  
Before a frustrated morning.

You can quietly  
Thumb your fingers on  
His placid throat  
And try to investigate  
How does he say  
The word "fuck".

# Moments

By Hadi Hussain



A few moments are left.  
Just a few moments more,

And I'll depart from this city,  
from his city.  
Moments are all we have.  
It was a moment, long ago

When while crossing a road,  
he looked at me.  
First time ever someone didn't look but  
saw me.

I can still recall that look  
which made me so special that day.

It was just a moment when  
while I was humming a ballad, a love  
ballad  
he started tapping his fingers on the  
table between us.  
He was listening to me.

First time ever someone didn't just hear  
but listened to me.

I still remember his taps.  
It was also a moment when  
while dancing in the rain  
he kissed me.

First time ever someone didn't just hug  
but kissed me.

His touch is still fresh within me.  
It was a moment too  
when I was sharing travails and tidings  
of my life with him  
and he had tears in his eyes.

First time ever someone didn't shed his  
tears for me.

Their twinkle is still shining with me.

It was also a moment  
when while lying down on the roof  
top under the full moon  
I told him that I love him.

First time ever someone didn't conquer  
but won over me.

It was just a moment  
when he handed me his wedding  
invitation.

He was getting married to his cousin.  
A girl his mother had chosen for him.

First time I wasn't defeated but lost.

It's again a moment  
that I am packing up and departing  
from his city, his look, his hearing  
his kiss, his tears, his win  
everything, just everything.

It's a moment again  
that I am waiting for the bus  
with sheer emptiness and nothingness  
of heart and soul.

First time I am feeling such things.  
There can be many 'first times' in life,  
something said inside me.

It's a moment again,  
a last one in his city.

I am sitting by the window seat  
with endless tears flowing from my  
closed eyes.

I don't care about anyone, anything  
now.

No one remains important to me any  
longer.

First time no one remains important to  
me.

Simply a few moments to linger on.  
Just a few last withering moments in  
this city  
in his city.

And then everything will be over.  
Just in this very moment someone has  
kissed me,  
a known touch indeed.

And I come out of everything.

He is sitting beside me  
with tears in his eyes too.

Once again I am looking at him with  
tears in his eyes.

'I want to spend my life time loving  
you.'

The ballad I once hummed,  
he is singing now.

A moment again.

Just a moment.

Moments... all we have.

When while crossing a road,  
he looked at me.

First time ever someone didn't look but saw me.

I can still recall that look  
which made me so special that day.

It was just a moment when  
while I was humming a ballad, a love ballad  
he started tapping his fingers on the table  
between us.

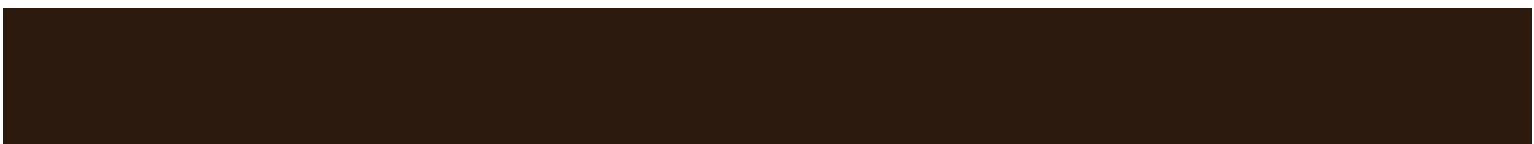
He was listening to me.



# **SMALL GODS**

Small things in Big Lives,  
Big Things in Tiny Lives

BY SOURENDRA KUMAR DAS





May and June in Kolkata are hot and humid, threatening months. The days are slow and sultry. The nights are lucid but bathed with leaden expectation.

Little was known, much was shown. There was no one else to hear the silence of the darkness but Sarvesh, and though he was listening, he was no longer certain. Perhaps the silence spoke something else.

Mayanagar, the countryside, turns a boastful green. On the rocks that are laid beside the huge trees. Beside which Sarvesh had taken bath once, flaunting his dhoti. And later jumped in the muddy water. How many times he would think of the whole world. This is the world that loved him and taught him to hate it. And with the second dip he would remember about his beloved Vrindanagar where he learnt more about Love, Love and Love alone. By the end of third dip he is with God and is singing “Jai Gurudev, Kreepa karo hai Gurudev, more paapi tomar payer tolay sthaan dao. Tumi chara mo-re kei baa aacha aei sanshare...” (Hey my Spiritual Master, Have mercy on me, I’m sinful, give me shelter at your feet. Apart from you, who else is there in this world...) River Ganga would spill across the flooded fields.

It was raining when Sarvesh came back to Kolkata. The small tulsi plant was visible from the road. The somehow old house at the end of the road wore its steep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. The tin roof is gone. Well, Sarvesh was dreaming. It is a new Home with new paint on it. How things change yet things do not change. Sarvesh looked at his waist – from 28, it is almost 30 now. Has he grown fat? Well, one of his lovers had said once, “Workout sweetheart, you will look like a Prince!” – Prince of Small Things – in the Land of Small Gods. .

Sarvesh looked at his mother vaguely for a minute and then touched her feet. The gentle grey-haired woman embraced him and drew him inside. Amazing, how a creature in this world can love you so unconditionally!

His home was filled with relatives and neighbours who came to see him. All who were assembled saw him with wonder the beauty of the boy of the noble clan, who looked like nothing less than a prince. He was dark as a rain cloud and his skin was clear and smooth. Under thick, brooding lashes his large black eyes shone like twin stars. His mouth was full and proud. As though right for a decent young boy of high Brahmin Family, he lowered his gaze before the elderly people, there was a pride in his noble bearing, and a kingly dignity about him, in spite of his tender years. As Sarvesh passed before them in the huge drawing room in all his youthful beauty, each of them wished they had a son so beautiful like him. Later when he was in the bathroom, taking bath, he looked at himself and found he has grown up. The Prince of Big Things has grown up to realise he is now the King of Small Things. How life changed from being a free bird to a captive king.

Sarvesh stood still for a moment, hot water streaming through his whole masculine body greatly carved like that of a handsome prince. The Cupid on his chest remained steady with its arrow to shoot. He saw in the long mirror attached to the wall in the bathroom, one of his biceps was bigger than his chest. He remembered how he was taken to a health club and hot wax was shoved over his chest. It was the most painful experience he ever had – a full body wax for a play where Sarvesh was featured nude with his co-actor as the role demanded. In the same night his lover has managed to turn his whole chest red with his marks of love. His lover would

wonder at the beauty of his flawless body.

After the pleasure or pain, excitement or perplexity caused by the night full of love between two handsome male bodies has receded, Sarvesh was always left with a residue. A distillation that we call as love. One afternoon he had taken bath at Tamuna River in January. He had committed a big blasphemy. Being a disciple, he has raised voice against his Spiritual Master. What a Blasphemy! One should live in Hell for million lifetimes. The cold water of Tamuna burnt his body. Sarvesh shouted and called for God. But the Small God never came to rescue the Prince of Small Things.

Here in Kolkata, he had spent his whole childhood. One day he returned home with a beautiful stone that was lying in the road. This city had given him many things, colourful stones, green leaves, beautiful flowers, fruits stolen from roadside gardens, sweets, and a lover who had loved him in the park. Friends who taught him that stones can be costly if they are rare. Well, all those stones collected and preserved under the earth were rare. And Sarvesh knew one day he would sell them and get a lot of money. The land got protected and on top of it, now stands a three storey house of the Mishras. So, the stones are safe and no one can dig them out of the mud. Not even Sarvesh.

Baba was thirty-nine when he died. Thirty-nine is enough to have two children and a good-looking wife. Thirty-nine is too early to leave the world.

In his fifth year his father died, after a lingering illness.

This was a sore blow for Sarvesh, and the pain of it he endured. He couldn’t cherish his grief. He gave himself up to it

as one gives oneself to a great joy; he fed it with a thousand childhood memories; it was the first important event in his life and he learnt the most out of it.

The day Baba died, Sarvesh woke up to find that his shorts were wet. Nowadays it is wet too. And sticky. This wetness would come to him when his lover boy would come to his dreams. Sarvesh thought Baba was just sleeping and tricking them as the neighbours were looking at him. Sarvesh used to do the same thing. Every morning mother called him in the morning. He pretended he didn't listen. So, he cheated his mother and slept for ten minutes every day. No one knew this secret apart from Sarvesh and Mini, his best friend in school. In Mumbai, he would pretend to sleep and not notice anything when his lover would stroke his fingers all over, kiss him on his neck and hug him in his arms. And the whole morning would go away in love-making with his love. Men are fathers, Men are brothers, Men are friends, and Men are lovers too.

Sarvesh would lay awake in nights and think – life is too short to be wasted. Few moments lovers walk together, and when the turn comes they all separate. What strange relations exist on this planet? He would never get why he was torn between love and hate for this gender. How would he know what he thinks until he hear what he says.

Sarvesh had dinner and went to sleep. He didn't feel like talking much to anyone that day. Anyways, it was pretty late. In front of the mirror, he took off his shirt and was admiring the boy standing inside the mirror. A boy with a dark complexion like that of Lord Krishna with sharp features and well grown arms was standing in front of him. It took a second for Sarvesh to recognise the man who stood there. There had being so many men who had loved this body, he thought. How many he wondered must have rolled their tongue and kissed his navel. And how many has kissed the arrow of the cupid in his chest.

The list was countless. He started counting, but left it at last. Savesh thought of counting the number who had loved him (not his well groomed physical body). Well, he couldn't start; before he could start, he left it. In his white shorts with silver buttons on it, he lay in his bed, waiting for some Greek God to come and hold him and make wild godly love to him. None came. The Prince of Small Things slept. Sarvesh was born in a hospital in Kolkata. It was a smooth delivery. Sarvesh heard from his Maa that he was smaller than any other babies. He would always wonder later why was he born so small. King of Big Things was born small in a big Government Hospital. Sarvesh would try to recall after twenty years how the first day in this world was. He guessed it must have been relief after staying his mother's womb for nine months. Memories never fade away. Happy memories do. Sarvesh closed his eyes. How everything seemed so peaceful and so empty.

Sarvesh's younger brother, 15 years younger than him; almost like a son. His second father was caring and loving. His brother was sweeter than he ever thought. Sarvesh's mother Binodini had married Chakroborty Uncle after five years of his father's death. And after another 6 years, Sarvesh had his younger brother, Chandan who whom he envied when he was born. But as days passed by, Chandan wouldn't think of anyone apart from Sarvesh. He experienced his first brotherly love in his life. Sarvesh's world was his Chandan. The small child would cry when Sarvesh would go to school. The baby boy would hug him when he would return from school. Again Sarvesh would put books in his school bag and wear fashionable clothes and ride his bike and go out. Chandan would wonder why he always stayed out of home. May be he never did understand his elder brother's other side of life.

And in his lovers, Sarvesh would try to find either his father or his younger brother. Alas! This young boy wouldn't know that neither a father nor a brother would be

ever found in one's boyfriend. He would often ask himself, "Can I find a real true friend in my boyfriend?" Well the answer is...

Sarvesh had hope for pleasure; he feared ridicule; a sense of isolation from an indifferent society who failed to understand the love of two human beings. Ages ago, it was a bright sunny day. Crows were too lazy to caw. Trees too lazy to swing. Wind too lazy to blow. Living creatures too lazy to move out of their homes. Among them, one was standing in the balcony and sucking a ripe mango. The creature licked all over till every drop of the juice was in his mouth. Part of the orange sticky juice ran down from the sides of his mouth. When he finished sucking, he took out the seed and wrapped it in a clean newspaper and hid it behind the door. This small creature knew one secret – how babies are born – baby trees. He has given birth to a baby tree with one small leaf. He visited his child everyday and made sure his baby got enough water to drink. He also stole his mother's new handkerchief. At noon, when everyone was asleep, the thief took out the stolen handkerchief and folded it nicely. He put it in his pocket. Then a thought came – his pockets could be searched. He took that out, slit open his zip. Inside the white cloth beside the two small balls, he hid the handkerchief. This was a place no other hands would reach. The thief knew this was a secure place to keep his most precious things. What an ugly truth he learnt later – this was what other boys would love him for.

The thief looked behind, in front, left and right and stood there for half-a-minute. When nothing moved, no one moved, the thief proceeded towards the balcony. The thief put his small fingers again inside the white pouch, played with his small toy and took out a large key. The large key went inside the hole of a large lock. It was turned once, nothing happened. Turned twice, the key was inside the hole now. A small click sound and the thief felt a sense

of big achievement in his tiny heart. The small thief put the large key, beside the small balls. No time for playing with tiny things anymore. The thief ran. He crossed the garden. He crossed Bir's House. The swamp full with vegetable creepers which Aalo Mashi would steal in the morning and hide it in her sari. He crossed the small dirty pond, beside which his baby waited for him. The baby smiled at his father. A father. A thief.

Four sticks were found and the handkerchief was taken out. No time to play with tiny things anymore. A Big Home was constructed with four Big Pillars made of Sticks and a Ceiling made of a Big Stolen Handkerchief. Inside was lying a Big Baby who had a Big Father who stole Big Things for him and made a Big Home out of it. No time for playing with small things. The home was safe, near the banks of the small pond full of big colourful plastics floating around. No traffic police in water to control traffic for fishes.

The first personal letter that came for Sarvesh through post was when he was in class five... What happiness he got when he saw it... "Ah! A personal letter for me...how wonderful!" And now he wonders how many emails he receives in gmail, how many more scraps he receives on orkut, how many messages in he gets in facebook or planetromeo. Nothing excites him anymore.

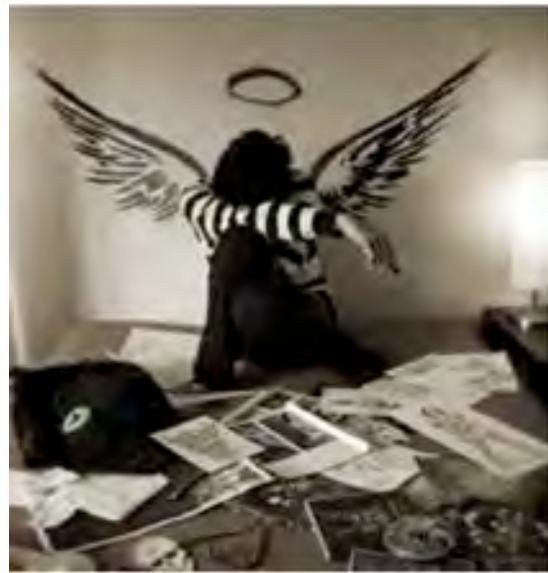
...it was a bright day in December ninety-nine. It was peacetime and two boys lied under the sky-blue sky travelled without alarm or apprehension. And at last, they made love under the sky. Gods watched when Mozim's love burst out and Sarevsh drank the whole of it. Filling the mouth and his heart, they lay naked for hours until they found the morning light coming out. The lovers made love again. And this time Mozim drank Sarvesh's love and filled his heart with

an exciting love which saw an unknown ending.

Sarvesh knew there was no one in the world who would come to his aid. In his terrible moment of distress, Sarvesh turned all his thoughts to God. He reached out to Him for help, knowing Him to be man's final refuge. Lord K then never came to rescue him and never a miracle worked out. "Everything," cried Sarvesh Sharan, "can happen everywhere where there is love."

God was the omniscient author, but he died; now one knows the plot of Sarvesh's life. And since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version. Time is reduced to presence, the content of a series of discontinuous moments. Time is no longer purposive, and there is no destiny, only chance.

The train would come in sometime. Time doesn't matter anymore. Only what matters its togetherness of two lovers Mozim and Sarvesh. They loved each other, in happiness that none can separate them anymore in their life. Their lives were beneath the solemn protection of the gods and were filled with an intense happiness that set every fibre in bodies trembling. For, just as the light at the end of the tunnel is inconceivable without the tunnel and inseparable from it, so human love is inseparable from the totality of human life. Thus with the sound of the passing train, the world heard the love story of two mortal boys.



# ReQuest !

By Chaitanya

Long rutted roads;  
let him choose .  
Just give him a chance,  
don't make him lose.

Not a single way is clear,  
like the truest tear .  
Then why not seek this way?  
To fight the frightening fear.

He'll sacrifice  
but why should he ?  
Killing his desires ;  
littering offending fires !

He's human;  
just a way different track.  
Find the human,  
and not a thing on a stack.

You are his mentors,  
you are his 'dears',  
accept him !  
It's not his fault;  
nor a disease, an assault!  
It's just an orientation,  
be proud to mention.

Give him the strength;  
Give him the freedom;  
Let him live,  
for you and for HIM.





## Blind

Avoid rejection, play a blind date.

But to avoid preliminary rejection, play well over the chat.

Portrayal of new patina over the same old flesh,

Fake blushes counted in, double-entendre behind lash.

Wicked mind over the availability of space,

Beneath dubious pranks, initiates the unhurried race.

## Come on YM

How can you think of friendship without sharing, may it be your pics or cell numbers?

"I am just here for friendship", moulds to "What're your priorities?"

Unwilling display of patience, dominated by unbearable desires.

Bathos in the dialogue delivery, cracks the crust of lusty fire

## Bromance or Romance?

In love with a straight guy, why not to go for some conversion techniques?

Jack took Jill up to the hill to pour out forbidden emotions,  
Jill fell down and trauma touched the ground,  
Yet Jack was occupied in blind devotion.  
If you can think of conversion, and close eyes in name of dark vision,  
What kind of love is there in your relation?

# THE OTHER SIDE

## A collection of 5 short poems

BY Karan Sood

### Girl friend

Lets explore about our orientation, and the only required apparatus for experiment is a girlfriend.

The 'straight' gay panics:

Mammoth might kill me,  
I won't sleep alone tonight.

Earlier who shared interests now share a relation,  
Requesting a refusal to God's decision.  
Under the name of sandwich, digesting two dry pieces of bread without butter.

### Diffusion

Sometimes, it's just an odour that dominates every physical feature.

Fresh forever, fragranced forever,  
Few artificial fruits in the basket,  
decayed a lively fruit last night.

Diffused souls, diffused fragrance.

But artificial tricks followed nature's deception,

Certainly, he was again pricked by Light.

# Evensong

By Niyor

Summer breeze  
White flowers  
Fragrant nights

Another season is almost over.  
You're still not here.

In my rented home  
I drink alone.  
I've wiped my tears

What on earth am I going to talk  
about?  
Perhaps, you'll let me in  
On how the world has done you wrong.

River wavelets, gently spend on  
thankful land.  
Do I need to work harder?  
The moonlight won't be here forever.

# It was in his arms that....

By Anirudh Induchudan

It was in his arms that  
I learned how to dream  
It was in his arms that  
I felt night is cold outside.  
The hands once placed over my  
shoulders  
and the lips once moistened mine  
are not with me, yet  
I melt like a candle in his memories.  
The words we exchanged  
The time we spent together

# Beginnings

By Maryam Laith

Beginnings  
Come from Endings  
And out of my endless deserts  
and my infinite pain,  
comes the rain once again  
and birth once again.  
This flooding of emotions running like  
rivulets  
that now etch their own beds,  
so long have the others run dry....

What does it mean?  
Hope it means.

Passion excites and often destroys,  
acting as fire  
on the dry weeds I used to grow as flowers,  
but this,  
this is more than that.  
This is love: cooling and soothing,  
rejuvenating and full of release.  
It drops from Heaven as patience comes  
from a tired mother rocking her sweet baby,  
and sends us all of to deep and calming rest,  
so that as we awake,  
we are prepared for what comes next.

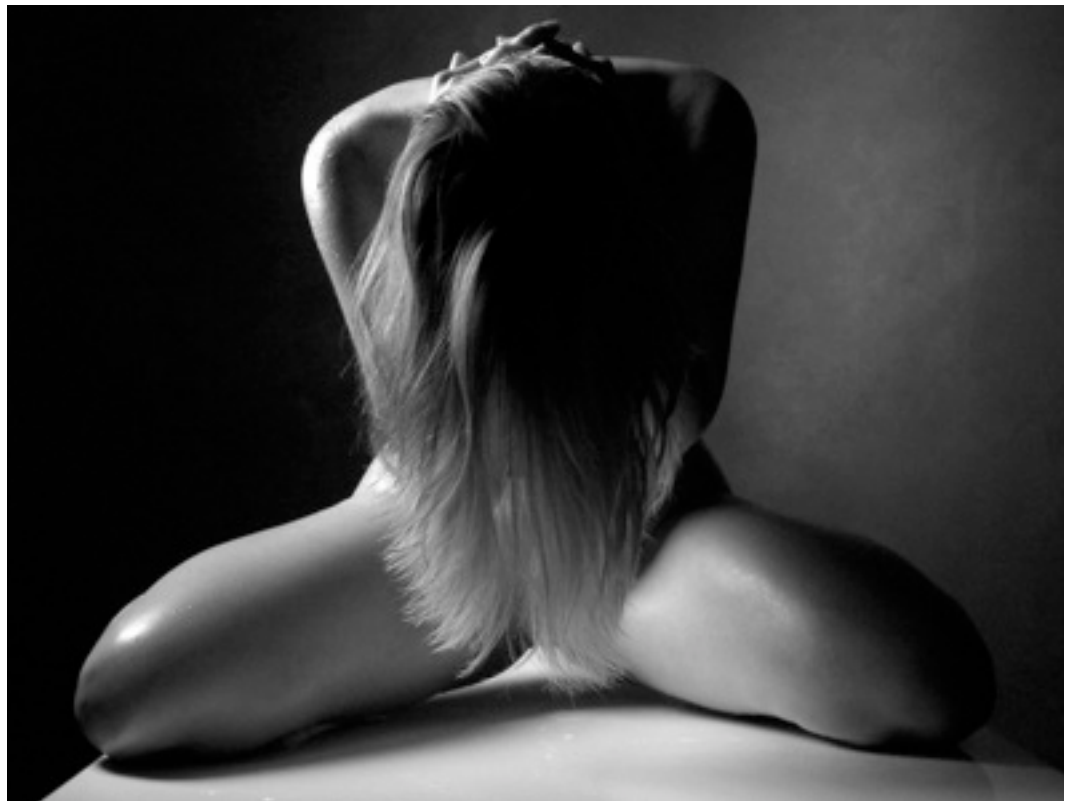
What does it mean?  
Change it means.

Because even through the rain,

scorching wind blows the layers of dust  
away,  
leaving old skeletons apparent,  
wiping clean everything easy and  
complacent.  
This is transformation: a devastating  
tornado,  
without mercy or compassion,  
forcing out new ideas  
and plans  
as destruction causes rebirth.  
Kali would dance to the rhythm of such a  
wind.  
The time for cocooning has long since  
passed.

What does it mean?  
Growth it means.

For even in the ruins of lost dreams,  
there are seeds that take root,  
pushing up through rubble and confusion,  
searching out the light.  
This is determination: without even hope,  
grimly choosing to go anyway,  
no matter what the odds because....  
because it's not odds that count here,  
but the journey itself.  
It begins.



# Let Me Sin Then!

By Dibyajyoti Sarma



One day I became a bhikshu. I shaved my long tresses, discarded the gold that my father had especially purchased for me, and wearing only a piece of saffron, I left home following the path of Tathagata. I decided to stride that thorny route. The road to salvation! Moksha! I joined the sangha. They gave me the sermon and a begging bowl. I was ready for my nirvana.

I knew about sangha as much as Sankhaneel would tell me, while in

Nalanda. We studied together. I was always curious, always confused with his ways of life. He was a Buddhist monk; of the same age as I but more mature. He was under the care of a monastery where his parents had donated him when he was only six years old.

“How could your parents do that,” I asked him once, “to send their first born to become a monk?”

“I don’t know,” said he, “but I am glad that they did. I can’t imagine my life otherwise. My life is dedicated to the world, and I hope with Tathagata’s blessing, I will earn my salvation.”

Sankhaneel was our friend, but his life was different from ours. There were many like him in Nalanda, monks with saffron clothes and shaved heads, as if they belonged to a different world. We also wore saffron dhotis. The silk, which I used



to wear at home, was not allowed here. No ornaments, no hairdressing, even no hair, no delicacy in food, no entertainment, this was the life in Nalanda. We were all same here, all aspirants of higher learning. Within that sameness, however, Sankhaneel and his lot were different, those monks who had vowed against the world and everything that dwelt there.

In Nalanda I was a timid lad, naïve and full of curiosity. Sometimes, I blamed my father for that, for not allowing me to experience the world. But life of a wealthy merchant's son in Pataliputra was like that, a life of luxury and incredulity. I had very few friends in Nalanda; Sankhaneel was one of them. I was drawn to his placid face, his unassuming voice. I knew him closely, but with much disagreement. At best I was in awe of him and at worse, confused. He lived in his own world; the world of existence was not for him. For me the world was where I lived, the world of taste and sight, touch and smell.

I remember that bright autumn evening when the hibiscus grove near the main prayer hall was in full bloom with their blood-red freshness. I was walking along with Sankhaneel. As I plucked one flower, he looked at me with scorn in his eyes and told me that I should not have done that. I asked, why. He told me, "It hurts the tree."

"But it is so beautiful," I protested.

"Yes, it is. But it would have looked more beautiful if it were on the tree."

"But then", I persisted, "it would not have been mine. Tell me Sankhaneel, you never desire anything."

"Yes, I did. I do". He said. "I wish if I were born some years before. Then I could have seen the face of Tathagata."

"Except that?" I asked again.

He gave me a long smiling gaze.

"You should better ask the Aacharya Mahodaya, Mitrabasu." He was still smiling. "What do you think he would say, Mitra?"

"Oh yes, I know. He would say that the world is maya, an illusion. We must try to escape from it. We must try to escape the clutches of kama, krodha, lobha, moha..."

"And this hibiscus flower is moha, won't you agree with me, Mitra?"

"But Sankhaneel, this world is real. This flower is real."

"This is the illusion of the reality. You are so engrossed with the illusion that you cannot perceive reality."

"But..."

"But? ...BUT won't you help me getting myself some dry log, so that we can cook something to eat."

Now, I realise Sankhaneel was aware of my ignorance. But he did not want to muddle into that. He never tried to impose his views on me, and his views were always solid. Those days, I did not believe him. I did not believe in his obstinacy to abstain from meat, while we friends would run to the forest nearby on occasions, hunt a rabbit or a bird, and relish the meat. Sankhaneel would display a sense of detachment, which was beyond my powers. His rules were not for me. If the world was an illusion, I liked that illusion. I did not want to wake up to reality, which I was sure would be dull.

In short, I never anticipated a life of bhikshu for me when I returned from Nalanda. I was full of promise for life, a

promise for a dazzling future, wealth and luxury, and the status of nagarika in the city. Father expected me to return home soon. The house was empty without me, he would say. I was his only son, the sole heir to his considerable wealth. He wanted to increase it with my help. He expected me to take charge of his trade. He was the wealthiest shresthi in Pataliputra. I was destined to follow his footsteps, to export silk garments to the West. I was no Brahmin. Higher studies were no good to me. I was literate enough to look after the commerce. It was enough for me to be able to count the numbers and able to read the business treaties. My father had scribes to write for him. I would also have one, no doubt. I had everything that a city-bred vaishya could possibly ask for. After Nalanda, I was to get married; my bride would surely be beautiful and wealthy, and I'd lead a happy grihastha life. My house was big enough to fulfill every desire of mine. I did not need to go around the world in want of something else.

That's where I made the mistake. I wanted this something else, this unknown that money can't buy. I wanted to drink from the sea of knowledge, never realising that the taste would be salty, beyond my powers of endurance. When I realized, it was too late. By then I was addicted to that salty taste. I was used to the arid ambience of Nalanda, its stone cabins, its monks with yellow linen, and to the spirit of Buddha that pervaded it.

Nalanda offered me a new life, a life that all the wealth of my father could not. I was reborn in Nalanda. I found myself in Nalanda. I was addicted to Nalanda. It was an addiction from which I did not want to be cured. I was in love with Nalanda.

Nalanda held me back. It was impossible for me to leave Nalanda without completing the last degree. Sankhaneel would say, verily, I did not learn anything in Nalanda. The five long years of my study in Nalanda were a waste. I must agree with him. He is my guru. But I know I learned everything in Nalanda. It gave me a new life, a new breath to my body.

But, was it Nalanda alone? Verily, no, Sankhaneel would say. It was something else, someone, for whom I stayed back in Nalanda, not for my studies. It was my moha, my love. It was Varunmohan. It was for him I couldn't leave Nalanda. I agree with you, Sankhaneel.

I see Varunmohan sitting there under the rock waiting for me. I see his thin mouth like an unripe plum, crimson black. I see myself hugging him. I see him interlocking his fingers with mine. I see him drawing me close to his body. I see both of us running towards the hill, to that ruined Shiva temple so that we can be alone. I see him lying on my lap on the cracked floor of the ruined house and humming some sloka. Oh, Varunmohan!

One day it was all over. I was awarded the highest degree. I returned home, a winner. My father was a happy man. He would show every visitor to the household, the sanchi scroll that I received as a token of my achievement. I was the first in my clan to achieve such height of scholarship. I was the icon of pride in the household, a precious cut and polished diamond.

Once again, I began to grow hair. Once again I started to wear silk, gold ornaments with sparkling jewels wrought in it, sandal paste on my

forehead, and flowers around my neck, such as a nagarika in Pataliputra dressed. I began to drink madira. I even visited courtesan Madanamanjari's palace on several occasions, hoping to get some solace. But her sad songs played on a harp made me more desperate.

I would run through the empty streets at night looking for Varunmohan. I was not happy, not a bit. There was something missing beyond my stupendous luxuries. Sleeping on the plush couch in my father's opulent house, I longed for the rocky bed of my Nalanda room. I longed for those days in Nalanda in desperation.

And today, sleeping on a bed like those of Nalanda, I am not happy either. Sankhaneel tells me, happiness is a state of mind. I understand. But my mind is no longer there with me. My mind roves around in Nalanda. It searches for him everywhere, Varunmohan. But he can't be found. He is no longer there in Nalanda. He is no longer the same Varunmohan I knew in Nalanda.

This place where I live now is a warm country. After leaving home on that fateful night, I walked for three months with Sankhaneel to reach this place, to a Buddhist monastery among arid mountains. They call the place Amravati. But I can see no sign of Lord Indra's heavenly kingdom here. The place is inhumanly solitary. The nearest village is half a day's journey. Except for chanting of my fellow brothers, I can hear nothing. Even no birds come here for food. I cannot have my peace of mind. I remain restless. I cannot sleep, or chant mantra, or read, or do dhyana. I walk alone among the gray mountains searching for him who cannot be found. My feet bleed, tears flow from

my eyes. But I cannot rest. I cannot forget him. I cannot have my peace of mind.

I visit Sankhaneel everyday seeking advice, as I did on that fateful night. That night, when the door to the world was closed before me and I had no other doors to turn to, I knocked on Sankhaneel's door wearing only a piece of torn yellow linen.

Sankhaneel was not surprised; he never was at any of my histrionics. He calmly invited me to step in, asked me to take a seat on the reed mat, and said, "Tell me, Mitra."

"I want to join your sangha, Sankhaneel. I want you to be my guru."

"I did not know you were that desperate, Mitra." He said. "How is Varunmohan?" I did not answer. It was much later that I told him about what happened. He held my hands in his. It was a soft, warm touch. "Are you sure you have renounced all your worldly desires?" I stared at him. He could read my mind. "Are you sure you would be able to forget Varunmohan?" I had no answers. "You have to control your emotions, Mitra." He was smiling in a calm, cool and benevolent way.

This is what he always says. "Try to control your emotions. Your desires are meaningless, Mitra. You know this. Why are you causing your soul to suffer?" But how to restrain myself? I always ask him. The same thing that I once asked Varunmohan!

I sleep nude in my cave. In my dream, I expect that freezing touch once again on my bare body. In my dream, I want Varunmohan to sleep next to me. I feel his hands all over me, scent of his perspiration in my nostrils, his heavy

breathing in my ears. As those days in Nalanda! This is sin, I know...

This passion, this moha! I vowed against it the day I became a monk. It was a conscious decision. I had left the world and, Varunmohan.

But...after prayers when I bow to Tathagata's statue, I see Varunmohan's beamish face plastered upon Buddha's heavenly smile. I don't know what to do. I can't ask anyone. I can't tell anyone. I still love Varunmohan.

I try every possible means to forget him. I fast for weeks. Sitting under the peepal tree I meditate. Then Varunmohan comes and tickles my earlobes, and my dhyana is shattered. Suddenly, he whispers onto my ears: "Get married, Mitrabasu. Get married and have children. This is what you are expected to do. You are a learned scholar. Don't behave like a fool."

I am a scholar from Nalanda. I have learnt everything, Astrology, Grammar, Medicine, Scriptures, Vedas, and Puranas. My brothers at the monastery attend to me in awe. I can chant the whole Tripitak without looking into it. Even Sankhaneel at times asks for my opinion. But nothing helps me wipe his memory away from my mind.

I asked Varunmohan. I asked him on that fateful evening to teach me to forget him. He could only offer me a stupid smile. He, Varunmohan, who taught me everything when I was in Nalanda!!

Of home, I remember very little. At eleven, I had my upanayan. My father invited the entire city for the feast. My head was shaved. I wore a white cotton dhoti. Holding the staff of the trunk of an Arjun tree, it was the happiest day of my life. I was the center of everyone's

attention. Women sang ceremonial songs in the backyard. The whole house was decorated with flowers and mango leaves. The Brahmins chanted mantras pouring ghee over the sacred fire. They put the sacred thread over my right shoulder and under my left arm. I was taught the Gayatri mantra: "Let us think of the lovely splendour of the God Savitri that he may improve our minds."

As the Brahmins asked me to do, I was ready to leave home to lead an ascetic's life when my mother implored me to return back with the promise that she will arrange my marriage with a beautiful girl.

Marriage. I did not have any idea what marriage was. It was Varunmohan who taught me the secrets of marriage, the sacred duties of a wife, the bliss of union. I experienced marriage with him, when I was in Nalanda.

Nalanda: After my upanayan, I crossed the threshold into the brahmacharya. Time to go to a Guru. My father was a rich man, so I could easily join Nalanda. I left home for Nalanda, and my life changed.

It was a disciplined life, rigorously frugal. At the beginning I had difficulties coping with the rigid timetable. We had to wake up at dawn, finish our morning duties, have bath and at sunrise we all had to assemble in front of the prayer hall for morning prayers. Then there were lessons of Sanskrit, Arithmetic, Logic, and Medicine. At dusk, my task was to carry water for the community kitchen. After these restless activities, when I got time to return to my room, I would be exhausted. My dwelling place was a small cabin, a small cave in the rock with a doorway and a small window. A small clay lamp with

mustard oil would light the place. I would rest for some time and practice the day's lessons. I had to work hard. I knew I was a dull student.

After some days Varunmohan moved into my dwelling. He was suffering from some ailment and was in need of a warmer place. The Acharya Mahodaya asked if I could accommodate him with me. I did not have any problem. I told him, as long as he pleased. He was a Brahmin lad—tall, pale, and emaciated with a pair of twinkling bright eyes. We exchanged our names and within a few moments I was sure that he had the potential to win any oratory competition. Very soon we were best friends. We would go together for our lessons, and return back. At dusk, he would help me carrying water to kitchen. At night, he would sleep early, while I studied.

Then one night, that night, I will remember that night till the last breath of my life—it was the night of my life. That night my life changed. Varunmohan was sleeping. I was reading the Bhagvata Gita. Suddenly, he woke up and blew the lamp off. I asked him why. "You are chanting Gita. Why do you need that cursed light," he told me, "now listen..." He held my hands and began to recite:

"Dharmakhetre kurukhetre samaveta  
guyutsavah-  
Mamakaha Paandhashaiva kimakurvata  
Sanjaya"

As he was chanting the slokas in high-pitch intonation, his hand was moving uneasily over my bare body. It crossed my armpits, my neck, my bosom, my stomach, and my omphalus and with its uneasy fingers it was trying to untie the knot of my dhoti. I was sitting still, cross-legged, listening to his voice without



comprehending what was happening. As soon as the knot was open, his chanting stopped. In the pitch dark of the cabin, he took my face in his hands and kissed me...

He tickles my earlobes and my dhyana is wasted. I open my eyelids and find myself under the Peepul tree. Nobody is here. Varunmohan is far away. I left him in Pataliputra. Oh! Varunmohan. This is sin. Oh, Tathagata. Help me my salvation. Save me from this sin.

Finally, one day everything was over. It was time for me to leave Nalanda. Our studies were complete. We got our degrees. It happened so quickly, before I could savour my life in Nalanda. The Aacharya Mahodaya wished every one of us a successful life. I asked Sankhaneel what was his plan. He told me that he would return back to his monastery in Pataliputra, and then follow his master's advice. I asked Varunmohan if he was happy to leave Nalanda. He said that he was, and the news broke my heart. I was not happy. That night sleeping next to Varunmohan, I cried. I did not want to leave him.

"I love you," I told him.

He consoled me. "You have your duties to perform, Mitrabasu. Be brave. Go home and serve your parents; get married."

"Marriage?" I cried. "Am I not married to you, Varunmohan? I'm your wife. Take me away with you."

"Where?" Varunmohan laughed in the darkness of the room where we were lying together. "Now you are a scholar, Mitrabasu. Don't behave like a fool. You must go home."

I returned home, but after extracting a promise from Varunmohan that he will visit me on the night of every

full moon. His house was just one day's journey from my place.

I entered into the life of a Nagarika. Father was happy; I was not. Every minute of my days, I missed him. At the dancing halls, in the gardens, on the bustling city roads, everywhere, I searched for him, his shaved head, his bright twinkling eyes... I looked for that thin, lithe figure, his honey-coloured nipples, his deep navel, the tight knot of his dhoti, and that presence where I experienced paradise.

One full moon passed, then the next. The rain came and left me cold and insatiate. But Varunmohan did not come to visit me. Father wanted me to learn his trade. I told him that I needed some time. I was morose. The morning would find me in bed wide-awake, and at dusk, I would be brooding under the shadows of mango trees in the orchard.

Mother was worried. She asked me, if I had some ailment, if she should call a vaidya. I said no. After a few days, my personal dasa Biku told me that father wanted to see me.

At the afternoon, when he had finished his bhojan, I visited him in the verandah behind the house. He made me sit near him on the reed mat, and spoke to me in a very mellow voice: "Son, you have made our clan proud by attaining the last degree of Nalanda. Now, this is time that you should get married. There were proposals for your marriage even when you were in Nalanda. There were some really good proposals, and among them your mother and I have chosen this girl..." he adjusted his headdress where little pearls sparkled, "...her name is Radhika, the only daughter of a wealthy shresthi in Kanshi. So there is a prospect of handsome

dowry." He nodded flashing his heavy earrings. "We have fixed the next poornima for your marriage, as jyotishi said, it is an auspicious day. Now you must not remain gloomy and prepare for your marriage." He waved his hand as he finished. I could not utter a single word. There was nothing for me to say.

I was in a hopeless situation. I could not go against my father's wish. But thinking of marriage was anathema to my mind. In my heart and soul I was Varunmohan's wife. There were no other realities for me. I could never imagine myself circling the fire with a woman. Varunmohan was not there to offer me help, to suggest what I could do. I did what I thought was the best solution.

Next morning, I undertook a journey to Varunmohan's house. On horseback, I passed the countryside at a galloping speed. My mind was troubled. I was thinking if everything was all right with Varunmohan. He was my only hope now. I was hoping he would take me somewhere where my father would not be able to find me.

As I entered the courtyard of his house, Varunmohan hurriedly reached me. In the light of the afternoon sun, his bare body glowed like gold. I wished I could embrace him.

"What's the matter, Mitrabasu?" he asked me impatiently. I was expecting to see a face of happy amazement. But his face was writ with impatient irritation. He was clearly not happy to see me.

"Nothing. I just came to remind you that you promised to visit me every full moon."

He did not answer. He led the horse to the stable, gave me a mat to sit, offered a pot full of water and then spoke

softly: "It's good that you arrived today. You must stay here for next two days. On Chaturthi I am getting married." Married. He uttered the word softly and with conviction. The clay pot fell down from my hand and broke.

Marriage!

"How can you do this, Varunmohan? Are you not married to me? Am I not your patni?" Varunmohan closed my mouth with his palms.

"Mitrabasu, you are a scholar now. Don't behave like a fool, and you must not cry. You are my guest."

It was all over. The bridegroom was very busy. He had hardly any time to talk to me. I was a special guest. There were people around to take care of me. But Varunmohan was nowhere to be seen.

As a guest I attended my lover's wedding. The pundit recited mantras from the Veda describing the duties of a husband to his wife, and that of a wife to her husband. I, along with others, showered rice on the blessed couple.

My eyes turned moist and my mind went back to that lonely evening, when Varunmohan took me to the Shiva temple on the top of the hill. He also carried some red gulal with him. Inside the temple, he smeared the red on my forehead, tied his sacred thread with mine, took my hand into his and recited that sloka which meant, 'today on, I accept you as my wife'. Then he recited all those Vedic slokas that the purohit was now reciting. In front of that lonely God, I became his wife, and he my husband...

The villagers were teasing that as a rich friend of the bridegroom, I must offer a handsome gift. I resolved, I would. I took off all my ornaments, my headdress, and collected them in my angocha and offered all to the bridegroom, my husband, my lover. Varunmohan was perplexed. His thin face looked like a dry leaf. I was ready to leave.

Bending down, I touched his feet, such as a devoted wife did. He took my hands in his and said, "Try to forget Nalanda." Finally he said something to me. "How?" I asked. And he offered me a stupid smile.

I rode the horse the entire night. At dawn, I reached home. Except some dasas everybody was asleep. I went to my dwelling, asked a dasa to bring me a piece of saffron and asked him to help shaving my head. I took bath, wore the cloth around my waist, and went to my father's room. He was sleeping peacefully. I touched his feet asking forgiveness in silence. At daybreak, I left home.

I became a bhikshu. I joined the Sangha, still carrying the memories of Varunmohan within me. This is sin. I know. I will never attain Nirvana. I know. If only somebody could tell me, how to forget him. Oh! Tathagata. Only if he could save me!



# Let Me Live

By Sourendra Kumar Das

Let me live the way I want to live  
I have assembled myself in the way I wanted to be  
Let the things that I have not gotten, be left  
If we get everything, it's a wasted life!

The faint light of your world  
Is like the dust of broken glass in the dusk  
If you want to flow with the wind, let yourself go  
I won't keep my eyes in the binoculars!

The mast of the ship is broken  
Yet I am writing the story of survival  
I don't want to keep any of your  
Midnight Demands of love  
That's why I am trying to  
Swim and find the shore...

If ever silently from the sky  
Love descends in the early morning  
Don't search for me with sleepy eyes  
I won't be there!

Please don't light a light for me anyone  
I have counted the waves in the ocean of human beings  
In the platform of this station, I am lost  
But I will not return home in the last train!

The dreams that are in your blood  
They are running around in their own way  
whole day and night  
If you ever get time  
Just think where in the gap of your fingers I  
once existed!

Amidst the crowd of calculation, I don't want to be lost  
Like the old onion leaves in the rack of the fridge  
I am finished with the rice & dal of the last supper  
And I will not float in the water of the glass!

# Process

By George Henderson



Mon beau!  
Why was my distinctive predilection  
bestowed on you?

There was a laugh, and a silent beat...  
And I thought, this was apposite,  
Was I wrong, as I lost my heart to none?  
I wasn't,  
I was plain ludicrous.

They said, why poet?  
Why aver empty glass?  
If only they knew my poetry...  
Spoiled with shards of glasses,  
Bleeding profusely through the  
annihilated body,

Was there poetry in my writing?  
There wasn't, there was angst.  
The homo-boy sings of the rains,  
Of the beauty as well as the destruction.  
Then who are you poet?  
They asked.  
Just a stray, he is.  
"Homo boy, homo boy" they scoffed.

I was afraid, of whom?  
Them?  
No,  
From the whole orb which fagged me.

"Catch him, hold him, he's no good."  
"Burn the twisted frantic barmy."

I ran,  
Stones struck my face,  
My feet and my breast.  
All was red, all was stabbing.  
But I ran,  
from the people who were chasing me?

No

I ran from myself.  
"Mom" I mused within...  
Your cherub is bleeding,  
His sweet face is drenched in sticky  
mess...  
And his eyes are devoid any patina.  
Are you insulted, mom?  
Your son is gay!  
She was numb, she was stone, she  
couldn't tell...  
For she was with celestial, and they do-  
not speak.

"Dad"  
I ran to my hero,  
Look at what they made of me,  
Your baby is beaten and abused,  
Just as he's a fag, just as he's AB-normal!

"You're no son of me"  
"My son! Homo-boy?"  
And he turned around...  
And removed his hands  
From the stench that was me.  
The hands which rocked the cradle  
feared getting dirty.

"Homo boy, Homo boy"  
They are here!  
I am scared, and see I tremble...  
There are goose-bumps all over my  
body,  
I don't wanna die!  
Give me a chance, to live, to see this  
world!  
I am no stranger, I am very much  
yourself!  
Was this it then?

Because no one holds me his own?  
Because I have been cheated, left  
behind, abused?  
Because I am a loser to the world?  
An object to smirk?

I am alone-may it be anything,  
I would die a valiant,  
I would survive in full.  
And those who think of me as weak and  
numb...  
I can make them eat grass, if I may!!  
"Face the cowards" my alter ego chimes.

They were stunned, stopped dead in  
tracks.  
The orthodox flame of torches  
The stinking rules of the century  
Stopped.

Defiant are you, fire are you...  
apprehend!  
And when you do,  
Phobias would die;  
Darkness would crumb down to  
nothing...  
A glowing red sun would arise.

Embrace!  
A new day comes soon!!





# The soft rain

By Sourendra Kumar Das

At this moment..  
nothing else in the life seemed  
more important than this.

There was a burning urgency  
in both of them.

It seemed then that,  
He had waited all his life  
for this moment.

This was what they had been missing..!

He has found –  
the stranger...  
he was in love with.

He took the lover in his arms  
and kissed the lover softly  
and tenderly,  
exploring and the murmuring...

“Oh, my god!”

And it happened.

.....  
The silence of the room was broken by  
a sudden clap of the thunder outside.

Slowly, gay clouds in the sky spread  
their skirts open,

wider and wider,  
soft rain began to fall.

It started quietly and gently,  
caressing the warm air erotically,  
licking at the sides of the buildings,  
sucking at the soft grass,  
kissing all the dark corners of the night.

It was hot rain,  
warm and sensuous,  
sliding down slowly,  
slowly,  
until the tempo began to increase  
and...  
and it changed to a driving,  
pounding storm,  
fierce and demanding,  
an orgiastic beat in a steady,  
savage rhythm,  
plunging down harder  
and harder...  
moving faster  
and faster...  
until it finally exploded in a burst of  
thunder.

Suddenly, as quickly as it started,  
it was over.

.....  
They lay in each other’s arms, spent.

he held the lover close,  
and he could feel  
the beating of his lover’s heart.

He thought of a line  
He had once read in a poem,  
“Did the earth move for you?”  
By god, it did, he thought.

If his love was music,  
the lover would be barcarolle of fantasy.

He could feel the soft contours  
of his lover’s body pressed against him,  
and he began to get aroused again  
to get drunk in the wine of his youth.

His lover’s voice was husky,  
“.....”  
“.....”  
“.....”  
His lover murmured.

His lover leaned over him,  
and his lover’s soft hair  
started to trail down his lean,  
hard body...

.....  
It began to rain again!